



# The Totem Poll

Harford County's Election Poll Workers Newsletter

Building a better election process one election judge at a time

Volume 4 Issue 2

Winter, 2010



*Seasons Greetings*

## Inside this issue:

Job Well Done	2
Christmas Quiz	2
One Man's Tale	3-4

## Contributing Editors:

Shawn Larson

Dale Livingston

Jim Massey



## Director's Letter:

### Letter from the Deputy Director

Bravo Harford County Election Judges!! Another successful election and we couldn't have done it without you.

This year brought many new challenges for the Harford County Board of Elections. Early Voting was the biggest change. Having just one location for the entire County produced some unique challenges, but the Office staff and the election judges were up to it.

Harford County's Early Voting site at the Bel Air Library had the highest turnout in the State during the 2010 General Election. There was a steady flow of voters each day, who experienced friendly, courteous and efficient service from our judges. Efficiency was the key to not only a smooth election, but also a very accurate one. Naturally, this is what we strive for in elections.

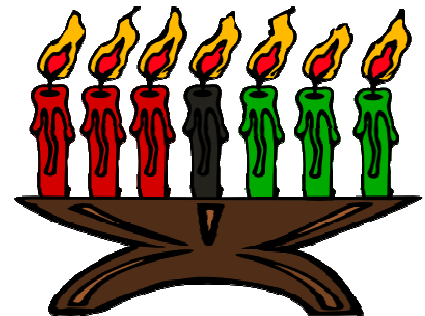
For the upcoming 2012 Presidential election, we may have 3 Early Voting sites if our active voter registration exceeds 150,000. We will then need to hire a lot more judges for Early Voting. So keep that in mind when you are making your plans for 2012.

In the meantime, let's all relax and celebrate joyously during our upcoming holidays. I know I and the entire staff at the Election Office will be looking forward to relaxing with family and friends. Then we'll get back to work and look forward to seeing you all again in 2012.



Deputy Director Dale Livingston

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah, Happy Kwanzaa – PEACE ON EARTH, GOOD WILL TOWARD ALL!



## Another Job Well Done

Throughout this entire election cycle, you had to deal with:

- Long training hours
- New procedures
- Early Voting
- Quick turnaround times
- Unpredictable scenarios

And through it all, we managed to endure yet another grueling election season. Although the election turnout was not as large as we had hoped, your hard work and long hours were not in vain.

Harford County had the fourth highest turnout in the State of Maryland at nearly 64%; with a State turnout of 54%.

Early Voting was no cupcake, either. Though the overall turnout through the six days was only 7%, it certainly didn't feel that way. The Bel Air Library, Har-

ford's Early Voting site, was the single most busiest site in the State with over 11,000 voters. There wasn't a huge disparity between parties either with 4,600 Democrats and 5,300 Republicans.

While many of the other larger counties had more voters, they were more easily distributed with some counties having as many as five voting sites.

With lines out the doors daily, 7% seems nearly incredulous, but reality nonetheless.

Every vote counts, just like the Amendment says. From Early Voting, to Election Day, to the Provisional and Absentee Canvass that follows.

Until 2012.



**Unaffiliated/Other  
Voters did their  
part as well with  
over 1,100  
showing up for  
Early Voting and a  
46% turnout on  
Election Day**

## *A Christmas Quiz*

1. What are the names of Santa's Reindeer?
2. According to the song, what do little boys get for Christmas?
3. Who was the first person Oliver Twist met when he arrived in London?
4. Finish this song line..."All I want for Christmas is ..."
5. Who wrote, "Twas the Night Before Christmas"?
6. On the seventh day of Christmas, what did my true love give to me?
7. Where did Wassail originate?
8. What and where is America's Official Christmas Tree? When was it made the official Christmas Tree?
9. When did the candy cane acquire its red stripes?
10. When is Christmas celebrated in South Africa?
11. Who was the first President to decorate a White House Christmas Tree?
12. When and where was the first Christmas card created?
13. What was the last State to declare Christmas a legal holiday? When did this occur?
14. How many "gift givers" can you name from different countries? (ie: "Father Christmas" England)

(You can call the office after the holidays for the answers—or wait until the next issue of the Totem Poll)

## One Man's Tale: A Global Effort to Support Afghanistan's Election

For Michael Comeau, election procedures in Maryland are quite the contrast from his days in the Army during his time in Afghanistan in 2005. Comeau, a member of Harford County's Election Board, at times can't help but chuckle at board meetings when discussing some of the "problems" we encounter when trying to run an election. Comeau, who served as Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Army, was stationed in Afghanistan in 2005. He recalls for the Totem Poll his experiences trying to run an election in a country during times of war.

For forty years in Afghanistan, from 1933 to 1973, it was considered a time of peace, but with no significant progress. The country was run by Mohammed Zahir Shah. It was Shah who attempted to modernize his country, though unsuccessfully. In 1973 he was overthrown and exiled to Italy which started a downward spiral resulting in Civil War after the Russian invasion. The Government lost control, the military faltered, and there were no elections to be run.

During the 90's after the Russian withdrawal, Afghanistan continued its decline. "Civil War in the 90's destroyed a lot of areas," says Comeau. "Guns were everywhere." The country now had no elections and no stable government (the Executive and Judicial Branches were in place but had no real power). The people who wanted power attained it through violence, not elections. "People by force of arms controlled [those] areas," said Comeau, who recalled countless times observing thousands of guns randomly lying on the street.

Since 9/11, American troops have been in Afghanistan in an attempt to stabilize and form a democracy in the country. During his tenure in

'05, Comeau's unit was the CFC-A (Combined Forces Command - Afghanistan). This unit had command and control of all military units in Afghanistan.

The country had held its Presidential Election a year earlier, the election in 2005 was for National Legislation, or Jirga, which is the equivalent to Congress in the U.S. Jirga is a tribal assembly of elders who makes decisions by consensus. For Michael Comeau and his unit, it was their job to provide military support and security for this election because as Comeau put it, "[Afghan's] military wasn't capable of supporting it themselves."

However, the U.S. didn't act alone. This election involved the United Nations as well. Countries such as France, New Zealand, Sweden, Finland, Belgium, Turkey, Romania, Netherlands, Singapore and Mongolia, all apart of NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) came together and planned on how this election was to be run.

"We would meet once a week," said Comeau, whose office was located in the country's capital of Kabul. Participants at these meetings would include different sections that were responsible for various operations such as planning, logistics, security, etc. "We would discuss how to get the ballots there," he said, "in addition to fighting the Taliban." Just imagine, different countries, different languages, different ideas and different experiences. Some of the committee members even used their experiences in handling prior elections in other hostile countries as a template in dealing with this one, though this election would prove more challenging.

For Comeau, going from an attorney in Harford County to providing military support in Afghanistan was quite the transition. His office in Kabul had no television and no radio; how-



**Board member Michael Comeau, a former Lt. Colonel in the U.S. Army JAG corps, played a pivotal role in the U.S. support of Afghanistan's Election in 2005**

ever he did have the Internet. He used this form of network to access the news and read Harford's newspaper "The Aegis." When asked how the military was received by the people, he answered, "Most were fine... but still wary." They were wary because they had previously dealt with the British and Russian invasion that did not have a positive outcome; however, the intentions of the U.S. would be different than in the past.

Comeau was commissioned to serve in this election support effort, primarily, because he had experience in this field; however, nothing could prepare him for the challenges that would lie ahead.

During this time, candidates for office were still fighting with guns instead of words, and election officials were getting killed by the dozens. Something had to be done. A strategy needed to be developed in order to avoid potential bloodshed. It was Peter Gilchrist, a renowned British Army officer that Chaired the committee Comeau served

*(Continued on Next Page)*



## One Man's Tale cont'd

under, who came up with a plan. Gilchrist decided to use this violence and spin it to their advantage. Since they were in charge of running the election, candidates were required to pay their filing fee by simply turning over their weapons. In the U.S., a candidate files by filling out a certificate and paying a fee in cash. In Afghanistan, their fee was handing over their semi-automatic firearms.

Apart from dealing with the threat of violence, the other challenge faced among the committee was attempting to form a democracy in a country that is traditionally run by tribes and by force of arms. Since prisons are a rarity, thieves are often punished by being forced to give up their cattle, or offering up their daughters for marriage. The economy has steadily improved since 2001; still 42% of the population lives on \$1 a day.

The challenge was immense.

During their meetings (which they attended fully armed and would even hear explosions from afar every now and then) their objective was to try and establish a Legislative Branch. Since they knew many of the candidates were the ministers or heads of militia throughout the country, it was Afghan's President, Hamid Karzai's job to keep the peace.

A strategy was developed to divide the country into four quarters to be run by different members of the committee. Afghanistan has 34 provinces, similar to counties within the U.S. Elected candidates for each province would serve as their Jirga. There would be three Commissions in each province, which basically means their own election board. Similar to the U.S., a deadline to file for candidacy was formed; however, there were no campaign finance laws in place.

Unfortunately for the candidates, there would be no electioneering

signs outside the polling places on Election Day. All campaigning ceased several days prior to Election Day with no exceptions. Soldiers would be present throughout Election Day for added security. U.S. and Afghan troops prepared security plans that called for local forces to provide two inner rings of protection at polling stations while foreign troops stood by in case of a serious attack. A half-dozen Afghan police officers would be posted inside each of the 6,000 polling stations. The U.S.-led military coalition, as well as NATO troops and other foreign soldiers of the International Security and Assistance Force, would stand by to provide a quick-reaction force, with more mobile and heavier firepower, if necessary, to be positioned away from the polling stations.

Times were strenuous supporting an election with a war going on at the same time.

The Afghan Parliamentary Election was held on September 18, 2005; Comeau however wasn't present for the election. He had served his full time in military capacity. He did follow the election that he and others worked so hard to put together. All things considered, the election concluded without any major incident. In the end, parliament seats were filled and a judicial system was set up. U.S. troops are still present in Afghanistan today with nearly 100,000 troops (only 17,000 were stationed in 2005).

For Michael Comeau, taking part in an internationally monitored election is an experience he'll never forget. He knows the U.S. intends to leave Afghanistan one day, but the concern is whether stability might leave with it. He remains thankful he can run elections in a different capacity now, than he did in 2005, and in a safer and more secure setting; which is why he feels justified chuckling at a board meeting every once and a while...



**Afghanistan held its first direct parliamentary election in September 2005**



**An Afghan man casting his ballot at a polling station at Lashkar Gah, which is the capital of Helmand province.**



**Kabul, the capital and largest city in Afghanistan, was where Michael Comeau held office in 2005.**